DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 343 325 EC 301 009

AUTHOR Stanley, Patricia D.; And Others
TITLE The Effect of Race on Self-Esteem and Depression in Learning Disabled Children.
PUB DATE 13 Nov 91
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Conference of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (Lexington, KY, November 13, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Black Students; *Depression (Psychology); High Schools; High School Students; *Incidence; *Learning Disabilities; *Racial Differences; *Self Esteem; Self Evaluation (Individuals); *Sex Differences; Student Characteristics

ABSTRACT

This study examined relationships between self-esteem, depression, and race in 70 learning disabled high school students (39 white and 31 black). Subjects were administered the Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory and the Children's Depression Inventory. Statistical analysis indicated a significant sex by race interaction. Both white females and black males reported significantly higher levels of self-esteem than did black females. Results indicated that, overall, white females and black males reported higher self-esteem and lower depression than white males and black females. These results differ from those usually reported, possibly due to this study's use of a learning disabled population. Results also suggest that there may be significant differences between and among various subgroups within each exceptionality in the areas of self-reported depression and self-esteem. (18 references) (DB)

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The Effect of Race on Self-esteem and Depression in Learning Disabled Children

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Lexington, KY

November 13, 1991

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The Effect of Race on Self-esteem and Depression in Learning Disabled Children

Educators in the public schools serve diverse populations of students and, subsequently, interact with an equally diverse population of parents. Although generalizations from research are helpful in guiding the identification of students' problems and the design of appropriate interventions to address those problems, characteristics of specific racial or cultural groups, or of males or females, must not be overlooked if all students are to be served effectively. In addition, differences between exceptional students and those students not classified as exceptional must be considered. Such differences in the areas of self-reported self-esteem and depression are frequently pertinent to decisions educators are called on to make. To date, there has been only limited research which has explored these varying characteristics in adolescents.

On measures of self-esteem, little difference between mean scores of males and females in the general population has been reported (Coopersmith, 1981). Learning disabled students are considered to be at particular risk for experiencing lowered self-esteem because they typically have had repeated failure experiences within the academic setting (Meyer, 1983). Results of research in this area are inconclusive, however, with some studies reporting that learning disabled students indicate lower levels of self-esteem than nonhandicapped students (Stanley & Nolan, 1991) and other studies reporting similar levels of self-esteem between the two groups (Renick & Harter, 1989).

Academic difficulties experienced by learning disabled children may lead to negative attitudes toward school and lowered academic self-concepts which may generalize to other areas. Studies which have examined reported self-esteem in specific domains, such as academic, athletic, and social, rather than in a single measure have found that self-esteem of learning disabled students is lower for scholastic competence (Renick & Harter, 1989), achievement expectations, and perceptions of ability (Chapman, 1988). In fact, academic self-concept has been shown to be the single best predictor of academic achievement (Chapman, 1988; Richardson & Lee, 1986). Gender differences have been reported within the LD population, with boys reporting lower academic self-concepts than girls (Chapman, 1988).

Research studies targeting depression have, for the most part, examined self-reported depression in "typical" regular education students (Jacobsen, Lahey, & Strauss, 1983), or have compared regular education students to those who are chronically ill or who carry psychiatric diagnoses (Worchel, Nolan, Willson, Purser, Copelend, & Pferfferbaum, 1988). Results of these studies have suggested (a) that females typically report higher levels of depression than males (Sullivan & Engin, 1986; Reynolds, 1983; Worchell, Nolan, & Willson, 1989) or display different patterns of characteristics associated with depression (Gjerde, Block, & Block, 1988; Smucker, Craighead, Craighead, & Green, 1986), (b) that depression may be one factor predisposing some students to alcohol/drug use (Blau, Gillespie, Felner, & Evans, 1988), (c) that depression may be related to suicidal

behavior in adolescents (Gibbs, 1981), and (d) that as many as 32% of regular education adolescents may report either moderate or severe levels of depression (Sullivan & Engin, 1986). Results of a study which compared nonclassified and learning disabled adolescents (Stanley & Nolan, 1991) indicated that learning disabled adolescents reported higher levels of depression than their nonclassified peers. There has been little attention given to patterns of self-reported depression within the learning disabled population.

Racial/cultural differences have received little attention in studies of either self-reported depression or self-esteem. In states where a significant portion of the public school population is black, identifying similarities and differences in these areas between black and white learning disabled students would provide useful information for educators.

Purposes of this preliminary study were to determine (a) if black and white learning disabled (LD) high school students differed in reported self-esteem or depression; (b) if black and white LD students presented a different response pattern on familiar instruments assessing self-esteem and depression; and (c) if male and female black and white LD students differed in reported self-esteem and depression.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 70 students in three urban high schools in northwest Louisiana. Of these, 52 were males and 18 were females; 39 were white and 31 were black. All had been

classified as Learning Disabled based on Louisiana criteria, and were attending special education classes at least part of the school day.

Materials

Materials employed in the study included the School Form of the Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory (CSEI, Coopersmith, 1981), the Children's Depression Inventory (CDI, Kovacs, 1979; Kovacs & Beck, 1977), and a cover sheet which requested demographic data of each student, including school attended, sex, age, race, and grade placement.

Procedure

Teachers of the participating classes collected demographic data from and administered the CSEI and CDI to their classes. Subjects were asked to respond according to how they felt during the previous two weeks.

Demographic data, CSEI subscale scores, CSEI total scores, and CDI total scores were recorded for each student. Data were then subjected to statistical analyses. Because of unequal group size, a general linear models procedure was employed to compare group mean scores by race (white, black) and sex on each CSEI subtest, on CSEI total score, and on CDI total score. Item analyses were performed to identify any significant differences in reponse patterns among the various groups.

Results

Results of the general linear models procedure analysis of the Total Self scores on the CSEI revealed a significant sex x race interaction, $F(1, 66)= 6.82$, $p < .01$. There was no significant main effect for sex, $F(1, 66)= 0.42$, $p > 0.52$, or for

race, $F(1, 66)= 0.27$, $p > 0.88$. Group means and standard deviations are listed in Table 1. A summary of the results of the general linear models procedure is presented in Table 2. When group means were compared using Duncan's New Multiple Range Test, both white females and black males were found to report significantly higher levels of self-esteem than black females.

A general linear models procedure analysis of the General Self subscores on the CSEI also revealed a significant sex x race interaction, $F(1, 66)= 7.65$, $p < .001$. There was no significant main effect for sex, $F(1, 66)= 0.84$, $p > 0.36$, or for race, $F(1,66)= 0.39$, $p > .0.53$. Group means and standard deviations of the General Self subscores are listed in Table 3. A summary of the results of the general linear models procedure is presented in Table 4. When group means were compared statistically, black females were found to report significantly lower levels of general self-esteem than each of the other three groups. There were no other significant differences between group mean scores.

A general linear models procedure analysis of the Home Self subscores on the CSEI revealed a main effect for race, $F(1, 66)= 4.25$, $p < .05$, and a significant sex x race interaction, $F(1, 66)= 6.37$, $p < .01$. There was no main effect for sex, $F(1, 66)= 0.72$, $p > 0.40$. Group means and standard deviations of the Home Self subscores are listed in Table 5. A summary of the results of the general linear models procedure is presented in Table 6. When group means were compared statistically, black males were found to report significantly higher levels of home self-esteem than did white males or black females.

On the remaining two subscales of the CSEI, general linear models procedure analyses failed to reveal any main effects or any significant sex x race interactions. Groups means and standard deviations are listed in Table 7 for the Social Self subscores and in Table 9 for the School Self subscores. A summary of the results of the general linear models procedure is presented in Table 8 for the Social Self subscores and in Table 10 for the School Self subscores.

Item analyses using individual *t* tests were employed to examine reponse patterns on the CSEI of the following groups: (a) white females and black females, (b) white males and black males, (c) black males and black females, (d) white males and white females, and (e) white subjects and black subjects. When the Bonferroni technique (Silverstein, 1988) was applied in each comparison of two groups to ensure that the overall alpha level did not exceed .05, the following significant differences were identified.

1. Black females were more likely than white females to indicate that they spend a lot of time daydreaming.

2. Black males were more likely than white males to indicate that they and their parents have a lot of fun together.

3. Black females were more likely than black males to indicate that they are doing the best they can in school.

4. White females were more likely than white males to report feeling sure of themselves. White males were more likely than white females to indicate that they can't be depended on, that someone has to tell them what to do, that they don't like

to be with other people, and that kids pick on them a lot.

5. When white subjects were compared with black subjects, no significant differences in reponses were identified.

Results of a general linear models procedure analysis of CDI group mean scores revealed no main effect for either sex, $F(1, 64)= 2.00$, $p >0.16$, or race, $F(1, 64)= 0.16$, $p >0.69$. There was a significant sex x race interaction, $F(1, 64)= 5.26$, $p <.03$. Group means and standard deviations of CDI scores are listed in Table 11. A summary of the results of the general linear models procedure is presented in Table 12. When group means were compared using Duncan's New Multiple Range Test, white females were found to report significantly lower levels of depression than each of the other three groups.

Discussion

When race and gender were considered in the analysis of self-reported depression and self-esteem in this sample of learning disabled high school students, profiles emerged which suggest that, overall, white females and black males tend to report higher self-esteem and lower depression than white males and black females. These results vary from results which have typically been reported. One reason for this may be that subjects for most similar studies have been nonhandicapped students, and generalizations from nonhandicapped populations to an LD population may not be valid. For example, Coopersmith (1981) reported very little difference between mean scores of males and females in the general population in self-esteem, with mean scores generally falling in the range from 70 to 80. Mean

scores for the current sample of LD students fell significantly lower in the range from 51 to 68. Within that range, both white females and black males reported significantly higher levels of self-esteem than did black females.

Within the LD population, however, Chapman (1988) reported lower academic self-concepts for boys than for girls. In the current study, there were no significent differences between or among groups on the School Self subscale (academic self-concept).

In addition to sex- and race-related differences on the Total Self measure, sex- and race-related differences were reported on the General Self subscale, which reflects self-attitudes about personal interests, with black females reporting lower levels of self-esteem than any of the other groups. Sex- and race-related differences were also reported on the Home Self subscale, which reflects self-attitudes about parents, with black males reporting higher levels of self-esteem than either white males or black females.

In depression studies employing nonhandicapped subjects, females have typically reported higher levels of depression than males. In contrast, white female LD adolescents in the current study reported significantly lower levels of depression than any of the other groups. A weakness of the study was the small number of female subjects (9 white and 9 black). Female group means may have been influenced by a few extreme scores. Future research should employ larger numbers of subjects to investigate sex- and race-related differences within the LD population.

Knowing which children are at greatest risk for developing depression or depressive tendencies, and for forming a negative self-concept helps educators address both academic and emotional/behavioral needs of their students more effectively. Results of this preliminary study suggest that, in addition to differences between handicapped and nonhandicapped students, there may be significant differences between and among various subgroups within each exceptionality in the areas of self-reported depression and self-esteem. Educators, therefore, may need to consider not only a child's exceptionality, but also variables such as his/her race and sex when identifying academic and behavior problems and designing appropriate interventions to address them.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Total Self Scores

Groups	(N)	Mean	Stan. Deviation
White			
Males	(30)	58.47	16.49
Female	(9)	68.00	17.03
Black			
Male	(22)	65.64	17.92
Female	(9)	51.78	18.91

Table 2

General Linear Models Procedure Summary Table for Total Self Scores

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Sex	1	105.09	105.09	0.42
Race	1	5.55	5.55	0.27
Sex x Race	1	1718.43	1718.43	6.82*
Residual	66	16630.88	251.98	
Total	69	18459.94		

*$p < .01$

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of General Self Scores

Groups	(N)	Mean	Stan. Deviation
White			
Males	(30)	16.40	3.98
Female	(9)	18.67	4.42
Black			
Male	(22)	17.55	5.14
Female	(9)	12.78	5.56

Table 4

General Linear Models Procedure Summary Table for General Self Scores

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Sex	1	18.07	18.07	0.84
Race	1	8.32	8.32	0.39
Sex x Race	1	164.39	164.39	7.65**
Residual	66	1418.21	21.49	
Total	69	1608.99		

**p <.001

Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations of Home Self Scores

Groups	(N)	Mean	Stan. Deviation
White			
Males	(30)	4.00	1.66
Female	(9)	4.67	1.94
Black			
Male	(22)	5.45	1.47
Female	(9)	3.78	2.05

Table 6

General Linear Models Procedure Summary Table for Home Self Scores

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Sex	1	2.07	2.79	0.72
Race	1	12.16	12.16	4.25*
Sex x Race	1	18.24	18.24	6.37**
Residual	66	189.01	2.86	
Total	69	221.49		

**$p < .01$

*$p < .05$

Table 7

Means and Standard Deviations of Social Self Scores

Groups	(N)	Mean	Stan. Deviation
White			
Males	(30)	5.67	1.91
Female	(9)	6.33	1.41
Black			
Male	(22)	5.82	1.65
Female	(9)	5.44	1.59

Table 8

General Linear Models Procedure Summary Table for Social Self Scores

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Sex	1	1.00	1.00	0.33
Race	1	0.01	0.01	0.00
Sex x Race	1	5.11	5.11	1.70
Residual	66	198.96	3.01	
Total	69	205.09		

Table 9

Means and Standard Deviations of School Self Scores

Groups	(N)	Mean	Stan. Deviation
White			
Males	(30)	3.90	1.45
Female	(9)	4.22	2.05
Black			
Male	(22)	4.45	2.18
Female	(9)	3.89	1.36

Table 10

General Linear Models Procedure Summary Table for School Self Scores

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Sex	1	0.08	0.08	0.03
Race	1	1.78	1.78	0.56
Sex x Race	1	2.62	2.62	0.83
Residual	66	208.60	3.16	
Total	69	213.09		

Table 11

Means and Standard Deviations of CDI Scores

Groups	(N)	Mean	Stan. Deviation
White			
Males	(29)	14.24	7.69
Female	(9)	6.67	5.15
Black			
Male	(21)	10.88	8.03
Female	(9)	13.00	8.80

Table 12

General Linear Models Procedure Summary Table for CDI Scores

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Sex	1	118.06	118.06	2.00
Race	1	9.70	9.70	0.16
Sex x Race	1	310.30	310.30	5.26*
Residual	64	3777.88	59.03	
Total	67	4215.94		

*p <.03